

Innovative Educator Spreads Awareness for Sexual Violence

Issue

It's hard to imagine living in a world where you have to educate children as young as ninth grade about the implications of sexual violence. But knowledge is key, and equipping youth with important information is crucial. Rape is a major crime and health problem in our country today. It is estimated that one in four women and one in six males will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. The number of forcible rapes reported to law enforcement in South Carolina is only about 30 percent of the number of clients served in the state's 16 sexual assault centers.

With a new push from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to move education efforts to concentrate on primary prevention—preventing sexual violence before it has ever occurred—it was clear that South Carolina's education efforts needed to be revamped. With the education emphasis on academics during school hours, sexual violence educators are finding it more challenging to present their important prevention message.

Intervention

After receiving technical assistance for sexual violence primary prevention funded by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, one creative local sexual violence center educator joined forces with an innovative ninth grade language arts teacher and found a way to have her important message incorporated into an academic unit of study. For summer reading, the students were given the assignment of reading a book about a rising high school freshman who struggles as an outcast to find her voice after being silenced by rape during summer break. The book, entitled *Speak*, tells of the student's struggles to deal with relationships, cliques, and her quest to find the courage to speak about her unfortunate situation. The lesson involved the following:

- After reading the book, many students had strong thoughts and ideas about what they had read. The students discussed who was at fault for the rape, and what they would have done in the same situation;
- The educator engaged in dialogue with the students about sexual violence, helping them to dispel rape myths, talk about gender roles and stereotypes, deal with the issue content, and understand the long-lasting effects that victims endure; and
- The students' next assignment was to research the topic and use the information to make their own brochures about sexual violence prevention.

Impact

Reaching the target population through an academic outlet proved quite successful. The following are examples of the benefits reaped from this creative program:

- The students connected with the unit and they were able to learn about healthy relationships along with learning how to prevent sexual violence; and
- This creative educator has inspired other educators in the 16 Sexual Assault Centers across the state to incorporate creative, age appropriate, and non-threatening ways of getting the sexual violence primary prevention message across.

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